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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000343

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR GAYLE SMITH

USUN FOR HOLBROOKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/01
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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE VIEW ON KABILA'S APPARENT
ASSASSINATION

REF: SECSTATE 08596

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES EARL M. IRVING FOR
REASONS: 1.5 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, ACCOMPANIED BY POLOFF, DELIVERED REFTTEL TALKING POINTS TO THE ACTING PERMSEC IN ZIMBABWE'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DR. NGONI CHIDEYA THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 17. THE CHARGE PRESSED OUR DESIRE FOR THE ADHERENCE TO THE LUSAKA AGREEMENT IN THE WAKE OF THE APPARENT ASSASSINATION OF DRC PRESIDENT KABILA AND THAT NO BELLIGERENT ATTEMPT TO TAKE MILITARY ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFUSED SITUATION. DR. CHIDEYA REITERATED ZIMBABWE'S POSITION THAT IT WANTS TO SEE ALL PARTIES ABIDE BY THE PRINCIPLES OF THE LUSAKA ACCORDS.

12. (C) TURNING TO THE ASSASSINATION, CHIDEYA STATED THAT, ACCORDING TO THE VERSION OF EVENTS HE HAS HEARD, KABILA WAS MEETING WITH HIS FINANCE MINISTER AROUND 2:30PM JANUARY 16 WHEN A "LIEUTENANT" MARCHED INTO THE ROOM AND SHOT KABILA THREE TIMES AT POINT-BLANK RANGE. THE ASSAILANT ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE THROUGH A WINDOW, BUT KABILA'S BODYGUARDS STORMED IN AND FATALLY SHOT THE ASSASSIN. KABILA WAS TAKEN TO HOSPITAL, WHERE HE DIED LATER THAT DAY. ONCE IT BECAME KNOWN KABILA WAS DEAD, HIS CABINET MET TO APPOINT A TWO-MAN "PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE" TO RUN THE COUNTRY, ACCORDING TO CHIDEYA. THE COMMITTEE CONSISTS OF INTERIOR MINISTER GAETAN KAKUDJI AND JUSTICE MINISTER MWENZE KONGOLO.

13. (C) CHIDEYA REPORTED THAT PRESIDENT MUGABE IS CUTTING SHORT HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE FRANCO-AFRICAN SUMMIT IN YAOUNDE TO RETURN TODAY TO HARARE TO DEAL WITH THE DRC CRISIS. BEFORE LEAVING YAOUNDE, MUGABE MET WITH NAMIBIAN PRESIDENT SAM NUJOMA AND BOTH AGREED TO A MORE SUBSTANTIVE MEETING BETWEEN KABILA'S ALLIES. THE MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE "VERY SOON," ACCORDING TO CHIDEYA. THE GOZ IS LIKELY TO ISSUE A STATEMENT ON THE ASSASSINATION TOMORROW MORNING (JANUARY 18), CHIDEYA CONTINUED. HE AFFIRMED THAT KABILA'S BODY HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO HARARE FOR AN AUTOPOSY AND EMBALMING. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH POLOFF, THE MFA'S DRC DESK OFFICER, MAXWELL CHIKOROWONDO, REPORTED THAT, TO HIS KNOWLEDGE, THE MEETING BETWEEN THE DRC ALLIES HAD NOT YET BEEN ARRANGED, BUT PROBABLY WOULD BE ONCE MUGABE RETURNED TO HARARE. CHIKOROWONDO FLATLY DENIED RUMORS THAT ZIMBABWE IS SENDING MORE TROOPS TO KINSHASA TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION THERE.

14. (C) THE DRC DESK OFFICER STATED THAT KABILA'S CABINET IS IN CHARGE OF THE CONGOLESE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT KABILA'S CHIEF OF STAFF, BRIGADIER COLONEL KAPENDE, IS NOT DIRECTING ANYTHING, BUT IS MERELY ACTING AS SPOKESMAN FOR THE MILITARY. IF KAPENDE HAD BEEN BEHIND THE ASSASSINATION, HE WOULD HAVE SURELY ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO TAKE OVER BY NOW, CHIKOROWONDO OPINED. WHEN ASKED ABOUT POTENTIAL SUCCESSORS, HE STATED THAT NO ONE REALLY STANDS OUT. INTERIOR MINISTER KAKUDJI WAS

TOO CLOSE TO KABILA, HAS NO SUPPORT, AND IS TOO DESPISED TO PRESENT HIMSELF AS A CREDIBLE, LONG-TERM SUCCESSOR TO KABILA, THE DESK OFFICER OFFERED.

15. (C) COMMENT: CHIDEYA'S COMMENTS PROVIDE THE FIRST OFFICIAL ZIMBABWEAN CONFIRMATION THAT KABILA IS, IN FACT, DEAD AND THAT HIS BODY IS IN HARARE. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE A VERSION OF EVENTS, REPORTED IN THE PRESS AND ATTRIBUTED TO DEFENSE MINISTER MOVEN MAHACHI, THAT KABILA DIED ON THE PLANE TO HARARE BECAUSE SHIPPING A BODY HERE MAKES LITTLE SENSE. THE GOZ, PARTICULARLY THE MFA, HAS BEEN IN SOME DISARRAY WITH MUGABE AND MOST SENIOR MFA OFFICIALS OUT OF THE COUNTRY. WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO ASCERTAIN THE GOZ'S OFFICIAL STANCE AND ITS INTENTIONS AFTER PRESIDENT MUGABE RETURNS TO HARARE, AS SENIOR GOZ OFFICIALS APPEAR TO BE AWAITING THE PRESIDENT'S DECISIONS ON NEXT STEPS. END COMMENT.

IRVING